

Rael Strous MD

Psychiatrist

PO Box 940, Beit Shemesh 99000, Israel

Tel: 972-544-628254

Email: rael@tauex.tau.ac.il

USA Board Certified Psychiatrist

Israel Medical License: 31932

Israel Psychiatry License: 17270

July 6, 2022

Psychiatric Evaluation: Gili Greenfield Mahlau

Date of Birth: August 26, 1986

This evaluation is based on clinical interview and formal psychiatric evaluation, as well as my review of the relevant materials in this case. My opinions are stated within a reasonable degree of medical certainty.

Identifying Information

Gili Greenfield Mahlau is a 35-year-old dual US and Israeli citizen currently residing in Tel Aviv, Israel. She is married with two children, aged two and six. She was born in Tel Aviv, Israel. She is the third of four siblings. She grew up in the city where she completed high school before being enlisted into compulsory military service. Following the completion of her military service, she studied cosmetology and then moved to the US for a year where she toured and engaged in various informal occupational activities. She then returned to Israel and got married. Relatively soon after marriage, she fell pregnant. Her parents were injured in a terror attack when she was eight months pregnant. She has since worked for several years in the fashion and clothes import industry.

Presenting Problem

Ms. Greenfield Mahlau states that on the day of the terror attack she was at home with her husband. It was a Saturday morning (19/3/2016). Her parents had travelled to Istanbul on a culinary tour – a gift her father had given to her mother and her mother's sister. Her elder sister had slept at her home the previous night. Her sister had stayed over for social reasons and in order to assist Gili around the house given her advanced stage of pregnancy. She recalls that in the morning she received a WhatsApp from her father informing her and the family that there had been a terror attack during their visit and that he had been injured. Gili remembers that she suddenly entered a state of severe panic which manifested in the form of an anxiety attack. She experienced it as “a panic attack” and felt that she was out of control. She remembers that she had palpitations, shortness of breath and shaking of her arms and body. She indicates that she was about five months pregnant. As usual when under severe stress, she would call her parents since she was very close to them. However, this was not possible since they were in extreme stress themselves. When she finally was able to speak to them in Turkey, she felt a little calmer and relieved. She understood that her parents were injured from the suicide bombing from bomb fragments that hit their legs. She recalls that her brother flew immediately to Turkey to coordinate the situation from close and organize their return to Israel. She went to the Tel Hashomer hospital to meet her parents on their arrival in Israel. She remembers that the situation was extremely tense. She was enormously worried for their wellbeing. She was also concerned for her unborn baby and what the excessive sudden extreme worrying, and shock of the moment may have done to affect the wellbeing of her baby. In contrast to family of other members of the touring group, she was relieved that she did not have to attend funerals on her parent’s return to Israel. However, she does state that it was the beginning of an exceedingly harrowing, difficult and unstable year.

Long term psychological impact on Gili Greenfield Mahlau from the injuries to her parents in the terror attack in Istanbul March 2016.

Ms. Greenfield Mahlau indicates that the initial months and years after the terror attack were a nightmare for her. She expected to have a good and fulfilling year giving birth to her first child in the beginning of her marriage. Instead, her first year of motherhood was filled with stress and the pain and suffering of managing her parents’

medical problems. She had to leave her apartment in Tel Aviv and move in with her parents in their city of Ramat Hasharon. She became the 24-hour medical care giver for her parents. She was designated with this task in her family since she was about to go on maternity leave. She expresses that no one in the family knew what a major task this was to be – looking after all her parents needs including bathing them, cleaning them, dressing them, feeding them, escorting them to their many different medical evaluations and follow-ups etc. She also needed to take them to meet with the other family members including grandchildren. Much of this caring work was very physical and she recalls how difficult and painful it was for her body pushing them both around in a wheelchair. This special care that she gave them began prior to childbirth and continued for many months afterwards (to this day). She ended up living with them after moving back to them for a period of well over six months full time. Due to their considerable needs, after she gave birth, she decided to remain with them until such time as they would be more self-sufficient. She thus stayed with them several more months along with her new born baby until her parents were able to walk and move without her assistance and without the assistance of their wheelchairs.

She remembers this period of the first year after the terror suicide bombing as extremely distressing and stressful for her. She had experienced anxiety in the past, but this was all worsened after the terror attack of her parents. She does admit that having a close-knit family helped. However, she personally struggled. She remembers that she was filled with nihilistic questions over this time including “why did this terrible thing happen? What if her parents had not travelled to Turkey? How would her first year of child-rearing have been different had the terror bombing not taken place? Will my child be irreversible affected by the lack of 100% attention from his mother in his first year of life? How will my marriage be affected by being away from my husband for so many months with a new born baby?” All these questions tormented her during this time. She felt torn between her duties to her parents and her duties to her new born baby and husband. This was “very stressful and soul-destroying for me”. She shares that for a period of a year she did not work at all while dedicating herself to her parents. This was not supposed to be the plan – rather she had considered taking off three months for maternity leave and then returning to work. What bothered her the most was that she feels that she missed out on the positive bonding experience that she feels every mother deserves with their baby after

giving birth. This she says she had to forgo since she was dedicated to assisting her parents during this time. Thus her mother-child experience was far from ideal due to circumstances. Her husband tried to be supportive from a distance – he did not move in with her parents, but it was very hard and challenging for him as well.

Her post-partum months were also characterized by having to care for her baby alone without the help, assistance, and guidance of her mother which she had previously thought she could rely upon. This was due to the fact that her mother was preoccupied with her own medical care and problems – both physical and mental challenges following the terror attack. This time caring for her parents as well as raising a new born, practically all on her own as she envisioned her life at the time, was extremely difficult and traumatic. She had to change her parents' bandages and see them cry from pain in the process. Despite the knowledge that she was helping them, she found this distressing. She describes that "it was so difficult to see my parents in such a state." "I became overwhelmed from it." However she also realized what she was capable of despite the overwhelming nature of the sudden stress and how her life suddenly turned out for this period. Thus it was to some extent growth building despite the traumatic aspects. This helped her to appreciate life, despite the fact that she would never have chosen her life to have turned out this way after the terror suicide attack.

Gili states emphatically and categorically that to this day her life is changed since the terror attack. "I lost my carefree happy go lucky nature." She is not able anymore to simply get up and travel and enjoy life as she used to. She knows that this is related to her underlying anxiety "on a low flame". Anything she does, she has to think and rethink. She knows that this is all associated with the intense pain and suffering she observed her parents experiencing after the terror attack. They acted somewhat on a whim by travelling in the manner they did. She knows how frustrating and disastrous the outcome was in their situation. She is thus scared for herself and family. She recalls in particular how much her father changed after the terror attack and his subsequent injuries. He changed in function from someone always in control to someone dependent on others. She relates that he never returned to where he was prior to the terror attack including work function. She does however try to be optimistic despite the challenge.

Gili indicates that after the terror attack, she avoids public places when she can. She describes how she experiences significant anxiety and even “panic attacks” whenever there is a recurrence of a terror attack in the area where she lives as well as anywhere else in the world. With any news of a terror attack, her anxiety symptoms come flooding back to her. Whenever she is asked to speak about what she experienced during the time after her parents were injured and how she reacted, once again she experiences anxiety symptoms as expressed in her “body tightening up, tension, palpitations and general unease”. She is unable to attend any large social or family event or stay long in any public area where there are many people. This is as a result of her developing hypervigilance after the terror attack. She for example cannot visit the open-air market in Tel Aviv on weekends where there are many people mingling around. She states that she is acutely aware at all times to maintain distance from crowds of people. “I simply cannot take the chance. I see what can happen and how much suffering is involved.” She also jumps to any loud noise. All this is a major change from her behavior prior to the terror attack. She denies any flashbacks, nightmares, or dreams after the terror attack.

In addition to these post-traumatic symptoms, Gili describes that she is a changed person. She is unable to relax – a major change compared to how she was prior to the terror attack. She feels that her mind is never “just silent”. She is always on edge.

Despite these challenges, change in life outlook and ongoing anxiety related to her reaction to the terror attack and potential ongoing dangers, she did not receive any psychotherapy treatment. This she attributes to the pace of her life, having no time and expressing the sentiment that these are challenges that she has to overcome on her own and not believing that anyone can make this better for her. While she did not attend any psychotherapy at the time, she had been taking sertraline since age 23 administered by her family doctor for stress management. She had continued to take the medication all the years since she became accustomed to it, it had no side effects and she functioned well on it. She and her family doctor had therefore decided together that there was no reason to stop the medication. However, more recently due to her residual anxiety from her parent’s traumatic experience and the increase in her anxiety from the worsening state of terror attacks in Israel, her family doctor

increased the dose of the medication to its maximum dose of 200MG. She is certain that she would not still be on the medication and would definitely not be taking the maximum dose of the anti-anxiety medication had her parents not been caught up and injured in the terror attack to the extent that they were.

Gili states that over the years she has realized how much the terror attack has affected her life. She remains fatalistic about life since the terror and states that she now “recognizes the fragility of life”. She does however remain thankful to God that her parents did survive.

Previous Psychiatric Illnesses

She denies any previous psychiatric or psychological treatment or evaluation prior to the suicide terror explosion. She was however treated with anti-anxiety medication by her family doctor from age 23 as detailed above.

Alcohol or Substance History

She reports no alcohol or substance abuse.

Family Psychiatric History

None reported.

Mental Status

General appearance: young, casually dressed, informal, evidence of several tattoos.

Behavior: intelligent, tense, open, informal, honest. Despite the years passed since the terror event, appeared to be sincerely still struggling with trying to understand how her life would have been different had she not experienced the trauma of her parents being involved in a terror attack.

Affect: nervous and jittery affect when describing details of effects of the suicide bombing on her and her parents.

Mood: Admits to mood being stable and relatively good.

Speech: Clear and coherent

Thought disorder: No evidence of formal thought disorder.

Thought Content: No evidence of delusional content.

Perceptual Disorder: No evidence of past or present hallucinations. No evidence of psychosis.

Neurocognitive and neuropsychiatric status: fully alert and oriented. Concentration and attention ability are intact.

Impulse Control: Intact.

Insight: Good.

Judgment: Good.

Reliability of Mental status and interview: very good.

Psychological Testing

HAM-D and HAM-A rating scales and PTSD scale (PDS-5) were administered.

The **Hamilton Depression rating scale** (also known as the Ham-D) is the most widely used clinician-administered depression assessment scale. The original version contains 17 items (HDRS17) pertaining to symptoms of depression experienced over the past week. The **Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale** (HAM-A) is a widely used and well-validated tool for measuring the severity of a patient's anxiety. The HAM-A probes 14 parameters.

The **Posttraumatic Diagnostic Scale** (PDS-5) is a 24-item self-report measure that assesses PTSD symptom severity in the last month according to DSM-5 criteria. The PDS-5 begins with two trauma screen questions to assess trauma history and identify an index trauma. An item for each of the 20 DSM-5 PTSD symptoms is included, and an additional four items ask about distress and interference caused by PTSD symptoms as well as onset and duration of symptoms. Symptom items are rated on a 5-point scale of frequency and severity ranging from 0 (Not at all) to 4 (6 or more times a week / severe).

Scores indicate presence of minimal depression (score of 8 on the Ham-D), mild anxiety (score of 13 on the Ham-A) and signs of PTSD (score of 34 on the PDS-5).

Summary of Observations

Gili Greenfield Mahlau is a 35-year-old female with signs and symptoms of anxiety and partial post-traumatic features following the suicide terrorist bombing in which

her parents were injured in Istanbul, Turkey. Although she did not witness the event, the experience of her parents being injured in such a violent and sudden manner left her with significant anxiety, especially since there were several deaths in the terror attack. Her underlying anxiety which she had experienced and for which she had been receiving treatment prior to the terror attack, was compounded and became more severe after the terror attack. When exposed to further news of terror attacks in the years that followed her parents' terror exposure, she clearly experienced retraumatization which worsened her underlying anxiety. This has lasted many years to the present. As a result, she has experienced significant emotional effects over the past years affecting her enjoyment and function in several areas of her life. She reports how she felt that most of the burden for the care of her parents after the terror attack had fallen on her and she describes how her life was adversely and dramatically affected by her responsibilities towards her parents during this time along with the worsening of her underlying anxieties following their injuries.

Prognosis

Gili Greenfield Mahlau suffered significant anxiety following the suicide terrorist bombing in which her parents were injured in Istanbul, Turkey. She clearly expresses how her life has been affected following the loss. Despite the medication treatment she has received and the years that have past, it is not expected that her anxiety issues affecting many areas of her personal functioning will resolve in the short term, and they will continue to affect her for a long time to come.

Diagnostic Formulation

309.81 (F43.10) Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (partial)

300.09 (F41.8) Other Specified Anxiety Disorder (generalized anxiety not occurring more days than not in all 3 of 6 core symptoms)



Rael Strous MD

